VOL. III AUTUMN, 1934 No. 4

SMOKE

EDITOR

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ASSISTANT EDITORS

DAVID CORNEL DEJONG FRANK MERCHANT

Providence, Rhode Island

Wm. R. Brown Co., Printers
33 Eddy St., Providence, R. I.

The Drum-Majors in the Labor Day Parade

If each of them wasn't a prig
And didn't care a fig,
They would show it.

They would throw their batons far up
To return in a glittering wheel
And make the Dagoes squeal.

But they are empty as balloons
The trombones are like baboons,
The parade's no good.

Are they really mechanical bears,
Toys of the millionaires,
Morbid and bleak?

They ought to be muscular men,
Naked and stamping the earth,
Whipping the air.

The banners should brighten the sun.
The women should sing as they march.
Let's go home.

WALLACE STEVENS

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Two Sonnets

i

Caro Verbum Facta: The Flesh Made Word

If light were all If the warmth of this little light
were all the mouth might seek or the flesh know

If light were all Or if this fatal bright
thrust of the thigh were light and warmth also

If flesh were fair only as flesh is fair
or eyes confused only as the limbs move

Surely our riddle of girls were anywhere
as lightly spelled as riddle of dolls-in-love

— Our sawdust blood asks nothing We who ask
ask nothing We who hear in the sudden drum
within us only the jazz of marathon-dancers
pumping a witless tempo
                have become
calico sphinxes for a saturday mask:

There are no fortunes and no answers.

ii

The Angel of Goodbye

in greying rain the day creeps down the hill
softer than sleep in the slow flowering light

Speak Angel
if the cerемented will
of bulb and root stirs in its winter night

say if the mole strains back again also
from the remembered tedium of the air
or if the ground must yield up life to grow
infected by the chill that held it there

this young decay of april this corrosion
of bells eating the innocence of God
this Lazarus of Easter this explosion
of wakening seed from the reluctant sod

These are yours Angel!
Spring's no other word
than End
(than *So long!* longingly unheard

DUDLEY FITTS

Social Service

Sleep! all is well! the air still runs
the Avenues; the water drains
from the blueish mains; sleep!
the souls in hell
are still those of jews!
The extended hand is greeted here—
the social palm invokes a fleeting trance;
the furtive brow is measured, the eyes in a grim camera
focused in the babbit. The teeth! the mouth closes
slowly upon their doom.
What an interesting place, for there are souls that drink,
open up and bloom, in the spillways of their hearts;
here is the promise of life! laughter!
in the firm majesty of this room.
Come—let us be serious, alms
are brilliant gems, studding the soul
of a pinced face, and pince nez; nevertheless
an interesting architecture, making the eyes
a diadem. You can die with them—
and achieve in the newspapers an interesting look—
listing most carefully your every social function;
slightly boring—but they fill half a column.
Who among you can fill half a column
either for, or against the existing order?
"Femme populaire"—faces buried in the tea,
a silver spoon jerking in the index finger—
appraise the symphony!
The achievement is worthy for the soul,
that curious newspaper everybody receives, printed
in a metaphysical snobbery; the pince nez
punctuating the language of the indescribably vulgar
and the indelicately-indecent.

HARRY ROSKOLENKIER

Landscape Gardening

You say you'd buy the farm but you
dislike an aspect of the view?
But madame, plant an elder bush
And its pith-centered stalks will push
A wall of leaf and bloom and berry
Between you and the cemetery
Before next summer. Sow the alder;
Its quick wood will leap to shoulder,
Rude, against the slanting stones.
Give the ground a few pine cones
For winter screen, then let the oak
Rise slowly, finally to cloak
The remnant slabs, the broken words . . .
Imagine, madame, twittering birds
Within this thicket! You shall not care,
Shall not remember what was there.

KILE CROOK

To A Poor Old Woman

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her.

You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand

Comforted, relieved—
a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air—
they taste good to her.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Mediaeval Study-Hall

The entry of the rabbi's wife is prepared
By the opening of a thousand wooden doors
And the closing of one gate

The doors open like mouth-organs
High on the balconies of sense

O students, your pages are almonds
She has opened the cedar doors
That suave wood of the mountains.

HAROLD ROSENBERG

Conception

She watched the blue of the late afternoon
Take fire as she had seen it do more times
Than even she cared to confess, although
The wonder of the change was ever new;
Something in life one could not know too well
Or have too much of was this evening change;
The deep blue burnt and charring into gold
A rain of golden ash that sifted down
Across the window-sill into her lap.

She held a golden pool of it between her knees.
She dipped her hands and splashed them in the foam
Until they seemed not hands or hers at all
But two brown-golden fishes finless and slim
Trapped in the trembling circle of the light.
Spreading her knees apart she let the light
Over the fringes of the rug spill down
A pool of warm gold gleaming on the floor.

She was not tired of this, this gleam and glow,
This dance of motes by millions up and down;
This was accustomed music of no time,
A placeless echo stirring the bright pool.
She was not tired but only made aware
Of some dark interruption downward cast,
A shadow from a body held above;
She thought the wicker basket where the fern
Spread and grew lush its leaves down to the floor
Somehow intruded this effect of shape.

And yet again she saw how it came on
Dark over dark and dark upon the light
Until to where she sat it overlapped
And where her feet were touching on the floor
It touched; and she could feel the cool
Of an eclipse rise upward to her thighs
And felt how sure it covered without force
And how her flesh was aching through the cloth
Sick for the healing touch of tender hands.

NELSON DEL BITTNER

First Murder

I, through the grubby pages of a first-reader,
with Hiawatha killed a deer; the actual taste and scent
were on my lips, my fingers; I felt
that one who does this has a place in the world,
can slake both his heart and the demands of others;
why have I not struck out, forthright, again?

As one who dreams, appalled, over newspapers' pages,
I have stumbled drowsily through a reek of blood:
Hitler, Kemal, Stalin, Mussolini—
those are terrible names
which haunt the night more than the Great Spirit;
Anacostia, Saylesville, San Francisco, Florida—
I could get goosepimples by travelling in real places,
I could shudder through the hereafter,
and still forget all hobgoblin-legends.

Now I have forsworn
the play of slaying pirates, Indians, deer,
I also forswear in dreaming merely
my participation in the world's killing,
my guilt of letting, standing-by.
Let blood!—out of thousands
I let the life pass, weep at its epic,
am exalted at its sacrifice,
stand hopeless, hopeless and eating
by the might of the conquerors;
by their kind permission.

Peace is as much a matter of imagination.
as my boyhood heroics; ask Hiawatha:
do I dream while killing,
or do I dream I kill?

FRANK MERCHANT

Budding

Spring flashed like a goldenshod stallion
Trumpeting north. The unwary crocus,
The sleepeyed, lifted his puzzled head;
And when the bees like happy relatives
Assembled round the long-awaited heir—
Others broke out in a wave of laughter,
Ivory-petalled, tyrian, saffron, alabaster-curved—
A deluge of warm beauty.

The wind blows north. The waking trees
Balance their pregnant arms swinging
In the elemental dance of rebirth.
An odor mild and green of crushed,
Of opened buds thickens my blood in lassitude
Attuned for naught but love and sleep.

Robert England

2 Pieces

One Poem

The summer is not almanacked
so accurately as to belie
dull faces their benignity.

But as some quaint unhappiness
will fool the element of a tree
its aspirateness becomes the sea.

(Uncalendared, the route is such
as agitates specific calm.)

And dahlias are not crisp enough
to take the odor of this wind,
and tulips take another kind.

And though some images of flowers
are plain meridian and bliss
their cheapness is not heir to this:

that moral shapes are blue and sharp
and bright and animal and strong.

Another Poem

The grandfathers keeping warm preoccupied
with guile more honorable than amusing
the less dispassionate narrative.

The critical guise was adjectival: enormities
of a like sort never leave the sea: odd
monsters with the eyes of boys.

Too many objects dissipate the light:
the shore befriended the amphibian: you'll not
betray your main allegiance.

The grandfathers kept the fires up:
their cold boys'-eyes nostalgic at the last:
the great trees smothering out the sea.

ROBERT TALLMAN

Whistles at Midnight

When a factory whistle sounds as midnight strikes
and echoing footsteps wash down streets like rain
towards opened millyards, and workshops' unlocked gates;
let the telephone-girls pull the plugs from their switchboards,—
saying, "The number does not answer;" policemen
whistling along their beats, swing idle billies
and firemen play poker in their stations
though echoing streets flood over with echoed marching
and fire whistles mock the stroke of twelve.

Some poets and thinkers will ring each others' doorbells
and, rousing each other with "The Hour is here!"
spend a short night in dancing, songs and drinking;
and with morning, when the army fills the streets
mustered against our second civil war,
for the first bloodshed, offer their own bodies
shouting: "The Hour is here!" But quieter poets
and thinkers will herd together in barricaded
cellars, listening, hushed, for news of victory.

May they come forth, denying triumph to triumph.
May the streets fill again with duller footbeats
as they bury the dead, and write upon the tombstones:
"Soldiers and Workers! If your thoughts could match
"as mutiny could rhyme with brotherhood
"no Army would be found to fight these battles
"in which you gave your lives to half-matched thoughts."
Then may these sorrowers take on bravery
to move in quiet upon the massed machine-guns
discovering full rhymes for half-rhymed thoughts.

JOHN WHEELWRIGHT

Summer Plans

I swore to meet you when you came; I swore
To be there at Stone Bridge after dark.
But darkness did not come; all night the sky
Was red with flames burning the house we built.
The hills woke to a sullen light, the flames
Laughed that so much, so little, could be destroyed,
So the Stone Bridge saw only you that night.
And now where shall we go? where shall we go?
Summer is almost here. The ashes, pockmarked
With spring rain do not know they formed a roof.
The sea, I think,—perhaps an island where
We shall forget our home a while. We'll swim
Into forgetfulness, and when at night
The salt air mumbles with the coming thunder,
We need not close the windows. We shall watch
The muslin curtain swelling with the draught,
And say, I don't remember. Afterwards,
The consolation of the summer done,
And all the spirng's havoc overgrown with grass,
At the first whiff of autumn equinox,
We'll say, Where's home?—and build it up again.

ROBERT HILLYER

Day Is Light

Such were the things we bit for our
teething and sucked for our lord
with lambs swung on his shoulders,
the palms fronting the sacred pools
after the saintly equinox. I lie
idle among the chatter the grass dared—
the grass insisted and dared again—
and see a man among the furrows,
lowly like the beautiful most
of all beasts, beautiful like
the lowly beast near the willow.
So, shadows, I must sing,
I must stand on my toes,
and stroke the infinite
till its breast purrs.

Such are the things I knew,
and turned, and looked upon
lonely Eve with her fruit
in the ferns by the lake.
She said: Taste.
And this is the taste.

David Cornel DeJong

KILE CROOK — *Landscape Gardening*

is working a farm in Durham, Connecticut. Poems are part of his crop.

DAVID CORNEL DEJONG — *Day Is Light*

born in Holland, was reared as a Calvinist; but Biblical austerity also includes the *Song of Songs*. He has published *Belly Full of Straw*, a novel

NELSON DEL BITTNER — *Conception*

is one of the editors of a new quarterly, *Direction*, published in Peoria, Illinois.

ROBERT ENGLAND — *Budding*

is editor of the *Westminster Quarterly*.

DUDLEY FITTS — *Two Sonnets*

is known as a poet and critic. He teaches at the Choate School.

ROBERT HILLYER — *Summer Plans*

We offer this as representative of a Pulitzer Prize-winner.

FRANK MERCHANT — *First Murder*

read the Hiawatha primer, here described, shortly after the United States entered the First World War.

HAROLD ROSENBERG — *Mediaeval Study-Hall*

was an editor of the *New Act*, unfortunately deceased.

HARRY ROSKOLENKIER — *Social Service*

has published work in several magazines, including the Majorcan *Caravel*.

WALLACE STEVENS — *The Drum-Majors in the Labor Day Parade*

is Wallace Stevens.

ROBERT TALLMAN — *One Poem. Another Poem*

lives in New York, but was discovered for us by our Oklahoma correspondent. The titles of these poems are editorial merely.

JOHN WHEELWRIGHT — *Whistles at Midnight*

has collected his representative poems in a volume, *Rock and Shell*.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS — *To a poor old woman*

has also shown us a stirring introduction to this.